

INTRODUCTION

War-Technology Anthropology



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The title of this volume, *War, Technology, Anthropology*, not only refers to war technology as an object of anthropological research but also recognizes that anthropology itself can be a technology of war. Of the three forms in which anthropology contributes to warfare, the first and most direct form is collaborating with the army by providing ethnographic data on populations deemed insurgent (NCA 2009). A recent case in point is the militarization of AFRICOM, one of the US's Unified Combatant Commands, which is present in African countries to pro-actively 'prevent war', in part by predicting insurgency through cultural modeling (Albro 2010; Keenan 2008). A second, more insidious form of 'war-technology anthropology' is the diffusion of a militarized concept of culture (González 2010) that justifies violent intervention by attributing 'tribal customs' and 'harmful cultural practices' to certain populations, as opposed to the 'democratic values' of the occupying forces. The third and least acknowledged form in which anthropology supports the occupying forces is through silence on the matter of culture. Whether in discourse on human rights or debates on poverty and conflict, we notice a return to universalism. There is a tendency to

give in to globalist pressures and disregard the concept of radical difference.

How can one explain the transition, beginning around 1989, from covert CIA operations during the Cold War (e.g., sponsoring groups to overthrow democratic yet non-allied governments) to the post-Cold War series of ‘just’ wars in Muslim countries that present no direct threat (Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya)? Some aspect of present-day society assures the military-industrial complex of public approval. Historically, one could point to the way in which Christian fundamentalists, Orthodox Jews, and conservative Catholics have imposed their antagonistic definition of culture on American foreign policy since the 1980s (Hunter 1992). But the approval has been more widespread. It went hand in hand with Western audiences increasingly identifying themselves with values such as gender equality and democracy, in the name of which war was waged, while anthropology—‘the’ understanding of humanity—increasingly avoided the culture concept. In a media-ruled world of pundits eager to intervene publicly, the anthropologists’ silence condones for the larger public the hierarchy of cultures that is used to justify military intervention in Iraq, Afghanistan, and soon Africa. The condoning effect should not be underestimated when the silence comes from a socio-scientific discipline performing the state-salaried function of dissent in order to reassure the public that the state’s policies are being monitored.

The 300,000 soldier reports from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars published by WikiLeaks (2010a, 2010b) are instructive as to the problematic position of the coalition forces in relation to the local population. The picture emerging is that of an invader, alienated from the population and mystified by foreign ‘human terrain’, that is, an occupier suffering from Western exceptionalism. If we check the WikiLeaks Web site for the 20 incidents rated as

most significant by visitors (as of 30 January 2011), the geographical locations of critical actions in these wars all appear to be roadsides, which suggests engagements in the least human of terrains from the disengaged position of armored vehicles. Moreover, in response to the growing critique about civilian casualties, the military has more recently undergone something of a cultural turn. In the WikiLeaks war logs, the references to culture dramatically increase in soldier reports after 2007; however, they are invariably of the stereotyping, dehumanizing kind: "It is in their culture to"

In brief, the politico-economic structure of warfare has a cultural component. This small bundle of pithy essays offers an update on the cultural and structural components of war-technology anthropology.

Anthropology, Culture, and War

The fights in Iraq and Afghanistan together add up to over 100,000 civilian casualties (Burnham et al. 2006), a number that continues to grow. The wars are the outcome of a decision-making process undertaken by US and European democracies. Between the decisions and the killings runs a long but unbroken line. This collection of essays retraces that line, which ranges from war technology, including the use of drones, night vision goggles, and war games, to the more oblique levels of warfare, such as hierarchical distinctions used in the media, the sensory language of the entertainment industry, the new magic resorted to by poor African miners, and ethnographies that objectify other cultures rather than having their perspectives rebound on the authors' own culture.

There are indications that recent social theories are no less collusive with imperialism than was functionalism in

the days of colonialism. For one thing, post-critical theories have emerged that no longer question the logic of the state apparatus. In Latour's (2005) 'actor-network-theory', agency is dispersed in nature-culture hybrids. The maneuvers of the corporate elite are refracted by the network. There is no political structure supporting the chaotic and proliferating interactions of man and machine; the seemingly decentered Internet exemplifies the network (see Joxe 2002). In this view, cultures resemble the US Army's Human Terrain Systems (HTS) Project,¹ appearing to be interactive regimes devoid of perspective. Any claim to social critique is hopelessly 'asymmetrical'. This post-critical position is understandable in terms of the dominant, constructivist approach of science and technology studies, in which networks of users and designers together decide on the norms to be implemented in technology (Feenberg 1999). The constructivist approach prides itself on squarely overcoming the substantivism of twentieth-century dystopias, which warned about technological developments serving the status quo in function of a global political structure.

This volume revisits the substantivist hypothesis on what was once called the 'ghost in the machine', namely, the tendency of technology to standardize behavior and sideline criticism and hence to sustain those in power. Realizing an era announced since the late nineteenth century by various dystopias, the 'ghost' or the 'magic' (an invisible influence through this-worldly means) has, rather than replacing it, become an integral part of the machinery called science and technology. The substantivist idea of such a lethal 'structure' refers to the current transition of nation-states (non-collaborative empires regulating the lives of their citizens) into oligarchic 'corporate states' (versatile networks privatizing the commons), as described by Kapferer (2005: 16). Social negotiation is handed over to technocrats and to autonomous, anonymous apparatuses.

The drones do the killing for us. We hear ourselves ordering more drones.

The dominance of the symmetrical, post-critical position today prevents social scientists from confronting the reasons for current extremisms, starting with why the Taliban ‘hates’ the West. The presumed motives of religious fanaticism are poverty and suffered injustices; however, these do not account for hate. What the insurgents hate is something that they deem too obvious to point out and that Euro-Americans have become blind to: a deeply rooted sense of cultural superiority, the result of a history of colonization, imperialism, and scientific positivism. The twin towers of the World Trade Center were no arbitrary target on 11 September 2001. Skyscrapers in the Middle East and Asia had taken up the gauntlet much earlier, in acknowledgment of the challenge by the West. I here contend that the pinnacle of the latter’s deeply set sense of superiority is present in the social theories dominating anthropology. What are concepts such as ‘global scapes’, ‘plural modernities’, and ‘flat networks’, among others, trying to tell us? They find the sign of their superiority not in empirical data but in their culture, in their approach, which proves to be more open, inclusive, and diverse than the cultures being studied. In these theories, certain matters—for example, whether behavioral regimes in the public sphere affecting Muslim women might be ‘good’, as in protective against jealousy, depression, or divorce—have become irrelevant. The non-Western cultures under study are no longer in the position to determine societal theories; they inspire only moral discourse. Tolerance and an emphasis on diversity characterize the ‘correct’ approach. Acceptance of ‘other’ views confirms the anthropologist’s superiority. This is how anthropology could gradually evolve into a technology of war. The discipline whose task it was to translate other perspectives to

the point of unsettling its own perspective has settled for tolerance. Thus, it not only condones the dehumanizing of other cultures' values and practices but also exemplifies the search for a culturally supreme position.

Discourse on cultural diversity counters the imperialist enterprise yet seems in line with that search. What happened to cultural *difference*, which highlighted the blind spot in any culture? Today it has become almost dissident for anthropologists to take small communities seriously enough to treat their cultures as actual ontologies, generating a sense of purpose that academics could not fathom (see Viveiros de Castro 2004; Willerslev 2007). Once schools, universities, and the media stop evoking the post-colonial hypothesis of radical difference, governments have no qualms about the price to pay for 'rescuing' other cultures. Moreover, the justification follows a surprisingly magical, actually capitalist rationality—that of profit according to investment. Spending billions of dollars to legitimize the deaths of soldiers and civilians rests on a magical expectation. The ultimate human sacrifice will yield 'freedom' or 'democracy'—something Western, at least, that could restore the West's hurt pride at a time of diminishing oil reserves, rising Asian powers, and eager upcoming populations, Muslims and others. The motive is as rational as it is magical because any sort of help—whether through military engagements or development projects—benefits the already-haves, shifting attention from the negotiable basis of their wealth to other people's efforts to achieve wealth too.

The Essays in Two Parts

The first part of the volume opens with a perplexing observation. Combat in Iraq and Afghanistan is often nocturnal, sometimes urban, and mostly erratic in response to

insurgents' attacks. However, the latest technologies pertaining to allied warfare, such as remote-controlled drones (Sluka, this volume) and night vision devices (Robben, this volume), serve instead to reinforce the insecurity that they are meant to eradicate. Jeffrey Sluka details the increase in civilian casualties and the role therein of technologies that 'virtualize' human targets. The use of drones makes life and death decisions less personal, but 50 civilians are killed per insurgent. If the consequences were not so tragic, one could see the irony of the 'war on terror' being designated 'overseas contingent operations' by the current US administration. Judging by the rate of human collateral damage, these overseas operations are indeed 'contingent', as in 'subject to chance'.

Drawing on Virilio (2002) and Vasquez (2009), among others, Antonius Robben notes in the second essay how warfare in Iraq has come full circle in terms of violence. The face-to-face combat of World War I was succeeded by the empty battlefield due to artillery in World War II. The Gulf War, by introducing stealth planes, continued the evolution toward 'transhuman' combat and resulted in very few allied casualties, compared to the opposition. The war in Iraq featured a return to close-proximity killing, but with a twist: the face-to-face combat was mediated, and made possible, by images that dehumanize the victim. Robben (this volume) points to the sensorial, 'scopic' context of equipment that affects the soldier's weighing of life-or-death decisions: "Nuanced human and social characteristics that are present in real-life holistic vision are deleted, producing a reconstructed human representation."

The third essay by González bridges the apparent gap between war technology in the strict sense of that term and the use of cultural data to identify human targets. The human and social characteristics that Robben refers to are effectively deleted by anthropologists, who strip

ethnographic data from their broader social meaning and reduce them to behavioral predictors. González analyzes the government-sponsored reductionism of the Pentagon, which has committed \$19 million to funding a Human Social Culture Behavior (HSCB) Modeling Program that is geared toward forecasting human behavior by means of computational/analytical anthropological data. He describes how the US Army's National Training Center has developed software known as Reactive Information Propagation Planning for Lifelike Exercises (RIPPLE). Largely the work of game developers and Hollywood directors, RIPPLE employs ethnographic data to realize the army's deadly delusions.

The participation of anthropologists in the US Army's HTS research not only raises ethical questions, as suggested earlier. It is indicative that such research, in practice, has little to do with anthropology after its post-colonial turn. Brian Ferguson demonstrates in the fourth essay that in order to have their research fit within the army's format, the participating anthropologists have deserted the qualitative and interpretive methods developed by the discipline during the last several decades. Tellingly, the only way in which anthropology could be suitable for the military is by returning to legalistic approaches to culture (e.g., lists of customs and beliefs) that date from colonial times. Such a return coincides with the shift to pragmatic consultancy work, which has sidelined anthropology as an intellectual discipline. Ferguson concludes this first part of the volume with a straightforward appeal: the US Department of Defense (DOD) should get out of the social science grant business and stop covertly funding research. In addition, a professional organization, such as the American Anthropological Association, should have a permanent open forum as a means to detect such maneuvers. Passivity—anthropology's current state of affairs—makes the discipline instrumental in perpetuating war.

The DOD's involvement reveals how firmly anthropology is implicated in the American imperial venture. Yet there is no reason to assume that the trend is limited to the US, since it is perfectly in line with the global shift toward a pragmatic anthropology that serves development and surveillance purposes. Soon after the social sciences threatened to rise to prominence in the post-colonial era, they turned more positivistic on their own. With the ideology of flat networks and diversity, and with the failure of anthropology to evoke radical difference as a counterweight to positivist pragmatics and capitalist rationality, an important obstacle to imperialist adventures has fallen.

The second part of this volume further broadens the scope by discerning the less patent forms of war-technology anthropology, that is, the concepts and interpretations of the human experience that sustain violence and thus not only perpetuate but also spread and globalize war. One factor is corporate states that market security; the war on terror perfectly suits their goals (Kapferer and Bertelsen 2009). Across the world, these states gain significance by virtue of the insecurity they produce. Whitehead (2005: 13) refers to a "cultural loop," a means whereby violence reinforces violence: "roadblocks, random identity checks, manuals for identifying the 'enemy', and other forms of 'security' screening actually induce further insecurity and so generalize state violence or the threat of it." The insecurity generated by state terror in turn calls for violent state response. As Der Derian (2009) argues, the media and the entertainment industry, and hence the wider public, are part of the effort to 'realize' violence by 'virtualizing' US politics and war. 'Spectacide', the killing of an image, occludes the killing.

The next essay expands this argument to include the most rapidly growing business worldwide: gaming. Following the assessments in this volume by González, Robben,

and Sluka on the way that sensorial mediation plays a key role in today's warfare, extending the battlefield far beyond its geographic contours through drones, radar, satellite images, the Internet, and scientific representations, Robertson Allen (this volume) observes that while the "ritualistic element of gameplay is therapeutic, imparting a sense of agency and control" over an unruly environment, the digital and audio-visual media in games can also resocialize military means of terror.

In the following essay, a study of controversial war music videos, which Jean Baudrillard named 'war porn', Matthew Sumera (this volume) argues that people's claims about the truth of video representations of combat can be understood only within the affective frame and impact of the soundtrack. The heavy metal music accompanying footage from the US's two battlefields soft-pedals the explicit violence. Similar to the foot soldier's side drum of old, the soundtrack's drumbeats and guitar salvos are inextricably part of "the aesthetics of contemporary warsapes."

As Sverker Finnström demonstrates in the next essay, the global war's dichotomy of government versus insurgent has become the prism through which the national and international media report about political violence worldwide, lending dictatorial regimes a veneer of legitimacy in their fight against revolutionary movements. The growing complexity qua local-global entanglements paradoxically gives way to ever simpler representations in the media and politics, keeping the dichotomy firmly in place in Uganda. Just as terror inscribed in the landscape perpetuates insecurity and war (Sanford 2003), a resource for state terror is cultural 'othering' (Spivak 1988), which stereotypes the 'wild' and the 'uncivilized'. Finnström (2008) thus recounts the problematic relation between the Ugandan government, internationally acclaimed for its stability and AIDS policy, and its Acholi citizens, nationally reputed

as war-prone. Through such divisions, the Ugandan state maintains ‘a state of exception’ (Agamben 2005). The concept of ‘terrorist’ similarly serves the new right wing in the US by dehumanizing hostile regimes while continuing to sponsor state terrorism in countries neighboring those regimes (Sluka, Chomsky, and Price 2002: 22).

What is the point of supporting peacemaking tools in Africa, such as democracy and schooling, if such peace preserves the democratic deficit at the global level? The essay by Koen Stroeken (this volume) describes the “car-rion system” of Tanzanian miners, self-declared ‘vultures’, and their war-technology anthropology—more exactly, how their magic (called *mwanga*) accords with the global economy. The magic takes the form of an anthropology—a definition of the human—that can be used for warfare because it operates on the economic premise that an extreme investment such as human sacrifice (e.g., children suffering from albinism) will yield an extreme outcome. The wider context of this magic is a perpetual (versus subsiding) state of violence, also called a ‘resident violence’.

The global and perpetual war that the sacrificers of humans participate in permeates the concluding piece by Neil Whitehead and Nasser Abufarha. In it, they discuss the cultural dimensions that are crucial for understanding how acts of ‘suicide terrorism’ gain popular support and can potentially motivate individuals. The authors trace the transformation of the figure of the *fida’i*, the sacrificer (of self), during the PLO resistance in cross-border operations of the 1960s and 1970s. The self-sacrificer has now become an *istishhadi* (martyrous one), less secular, more Islamic. As Whitehead and Abufarha (this volume) put it: “In the poetics of Palestinian resistance, the sacrificed Palestinian body parts are a mimesis of flowing streams, nurturing fields, and blooming flowers.” The acts of martyrdom “‘penetrate’ the Israeli segregation wall, ‘break’ all

the barriers, and ‘pass’ all checkpoints” (ibid.). Violence has always been a domain of life, determined both culturally and socio-economically (Ferguson 1995: 278; Robben and Nordstrom 1996). Since 1989, we have witnessed the gradual, barely noticeable transition from regional conflicts to global warfare, structured both economically and politically.

Killing for Magic: The Global Political Economy

Whereas some of the underlying causes of global insecurity have decreased over the last couple of centuries, the degree of terror and the rate of civilian deaths have increased dramatically in the most recent phase of warfare. Civilized technologies of combat allow war to persist without appearing to escalate it. Night vision goggles and drones may limit casualties on the side of the allies, but they are not particularly effective in terms of ending global warfare. Previously, by making the most out of every kill, weaponry served to scare the enemy. The blood spilt visibly on the battlefield would push the enemy to surrender. Today, one side’s victory and the other’s capitulation seem secondary. Now, from the start of a war, the emphasis is on stealth, which allows one to kill as many as possible and get away with it. Again we notice the cultural factor. In a militarized concept of culture, it is inconceivable that the Taliban will ever change their minds. Because of their culture, they should all be eliminated, and this requires ‘clean’ kills, the kind featured in video games. The high number of casualties during and after the 2003 Iraq invasion, estimated at a total of over 600,000 (Burnham et al. 2006), is concealed by the absence of blood on television and on satellite images. The main intention, it seems, is to prolong a military presence—that is, to perpetuate war for the sake of war.

If warfare between nations is a thing of the past and is being replaced today by a global war, as argued by Hardt and Negri (2004), this volume shows that the 'global' actually refers to the way that war has become part of our economy, technology, thought, and entertainment. The technologies of precision bombing, satellite images, drones, and applied anthropology dehumanize the victims and, in so doing, guarantee the continuation of war. Nobody believes that the Af-Pak wars were intended as duels with winners and losers. The expected outcome is not surrender by the enemy in a conventional sense. We can imagine the incredulous reaction of a US general if a Taliban warrior were to approach him, brandishing a white flag. It is preposterous to suggest that a sudden show of respect for democracy and women's rights would make a difference to anyone involved. Nobody counts on surrender. Nobody counts on the war ending.

Why is this so? Together with the demise and subsequent militarization of the culture concept, we observe the mainstreaming of war. The military industry, like any other industry, counts on its profits rising annually. War technology no longer stands for an exceptional means purposely developed to assist in a specific war. Finding ongoing markets for warfare is a regular preoccupation of economic elites. A first piece of evidence is that the duel between rival states that are worthy opponents of each other—and would hence result in a potentially cataclysmic clash—is replaced by wars waged on countries that, in principle, stand no chance. Typically, these nations have a large population of poor people, who bear the brunt of the country's loss of lives, and lack international communication channels that could present their side of the story (recently exemplified by army operations in Libya). An immediate predecessor was the Cold War, during which the two main rivals remained remotely affected while

the predatory implications of their economies (whether privately owned or state-owned) were exported to ‘civil wars’ in satellite states, mostly to global peripheries such as Korea, Vietnam, Congo, Togo, Angola, and Chile in what was then called the Third World. During the Reagan administration in the 1980s, at a time when no incidents of ‘terrorism’ were recorded and the Cold War appeared to wane, counter-terrorism was a promise made to the industry in the form of a prophecy (Zulaika 2009).

A second indicator of the war’s economic impetus is the US military’s change of the designation ‘global war on terror’ to ‘the long war’. As exemplified by the epithet ‘Operation Enduring Freedom’, it seems that the only sure feature of the war is its perpetuity (Joxe 2002; Kapferer 2005). David Keen (2007) has listed the advertising tricks—or what he calls ‘magic’—that the US government has been using to keep the war serial and endless. These tactics include scapegoating, wishful thinking, creating a demand for one’s military supply, promising big gains, and lumping conflicts across the world into one enemy. The last tactic to perpetuate war has been alternated with its opposite, an equally effective disaggregation, as illustrated by the Obama administration’s recent preference for the innocuous-sounding phrase ‘overseas contingent operations’.

A third indicator of the economic structure of warfare is manifest in the historical evolution since the 1814 Treaty of Ghent, which ended the war between Great Britain and the United States of America, wherein (besides promoting the abolition of slavery) the latter promised to restore to the “Tribes or Nations of Indians ... all the possessions, rights, and privileges which they may have enjoyed or been entitled to in 1811 previous to such hostilities.”² The Treaty of Ghent testified to an awareness about the significance of war beyond its geographic confines, such as the injustice befalling satellite groups. Two centuries later,

poverty, as endured by the Indian Nations or the formerly colonized, has basically become an identity marking the enemy. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the warred-on side is not supposed to stand a chance. No possessions, rights, or privileges that they may have enjoyed or been entitled to previous to such hostilities will be restored. This fixed hegemonic structure within a bustling global network of criss-crossing cultural flows is what Hardt and Negri (2000, 2004) understand by 'Empire'. Our remarkable disinterest in the casualties is proof of the extent to which Empire means war. Only people fully involved in a war do not care about casualties.

A final indicator of the economic impetus of war is that nobody seriously believes that victory by 'our armies' will achieve an end to the war, after which an era of peace will commence. There could be no world without one or the other state sooner or later provoking the anger of the (currently) sole superpower, followed by a call for preventive strikes under the banner of security. A common trait of the political regimes targeted by the US since World War II is not dictatorship. Rather, what the USSR, the ayatollahs, and the Taliban have in common is the denial of the standards by which the US triumphs over the rest of the world. Many American citizens, if they were better informed, would probably not sympathize with the corrupt elites put in place by their administration and perhaps could identify better with the rebels, who believe that they are fighting for a righteous cause and against a powerful oppressor.

Why do we focus on the bearded ayatollahs, the Taliban, the Maoist Vietcong, and the freedom fighters recruited from villages, rather than targeting the opulent squandering of the shah (Iran), the corruption of bureaucratic elites (South Vietnam), or the dictators (such as Mobutu in the former Zaire) who violate every human right? The evil of

dictators does not scare us because it keeps the structure of our global political economy in place. What scares us is the alternative. By representing the invasions as independent from the history of ideas that disciplines partake of, anthropologists risk distancing these moments of violence, placing themselves in the position of spectators, and pretending that these are not their battles. The war will last as long as one of the parties denies being involved.

Notes

1. See <http://humanterrainsystem.army.mil/>.
2. Treaty of Ghent (1814), article 9, Library of Congress, <http://www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/ourdocs/Ghent.html>.

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